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FitzWalter, daughter of Milo, who built St. Briavels Castle in 1131, gave to King John all the rights he possessed in the Forest of Dean, but it is believed the singular right of the commoners was reserved. Cromwell tried to usurp these rights, but on the restoration of Charles II they were confirmed by Act 20, Charles II, cap. 3. Rudder¹ states that tradition says the commoners' privilege was obtained of some Earl of Hereford, then lord of the Forest of Dean, at the instance of his lady, upon the same hard terms that Lady Godiva² obtained the privilege for the citizens of Coventry.

Hudnall's Wood originally covered some 1200 acres, but has been reduced by encroachment to about 600 acres. It lies between the River Wye and Offa's Dyke, to the south-west of St. Briavels Church and Castle (which is opposite to the church).

Offa's Dyke, in this area,³ runs north and south for a considerable distance and then forms a loop. Sir Cyril Fox has observed "that the shrinkage of the area of public land follows the usual history of encroachment: namely, that the only land left as common by our time is that portion which is almost worthless. The remaining strip is the steepest part of the slope and covered with boulders, all the reasonably level and cultivable land is in other hands. I should say that Offa's Dyke at the time that the privilege was granted (probably the twelfth century) was without any significance as a boundary—a very interesting fact."

E. M. CLIFFORD

ALBINOS AND ALBINISM IN IRANIAN TRADITION

THE importance of the "abnormal" in the history of religious thought has been pointed out in a number of relatively recent books.¹ It is indeed quite certain that man, in virtually all stages of culture, has a very keen appreciation of what we call "norm", an appreciation which he appears to share with the higher animals. All "abnormal" phenomena are therefore likely to become the objects of superstitious fears or hopes; they are regarded as manifestations of some supernatural power or agency, which as such is usually held in awe, occasionally prayed to, and propitiated in the expectation that it may eventually be turned to the greater benefit and advantage of the worshippers.

Human births may become "abnormal" for a number of reasons: they may be multiple; they may produce an albino child or a child

¹ Rudder, *Glos.*, p. 307.

² In *Printed Extracts No. I, County Folklore, Glos.*, 1892, the late Dr. E. Sidney Hartland refers in detail to the tradition that this is another instance of the Lady Godiva story.

³ *Arch. Camb.*, vol. lxxxi and ff., Sir Cyril Fox.

¹ Karl Beth, *Religion und Magie bei den Naturvölkern*, Leipzig-Berlin, 1914, p. 97; L. Lévy-Bruhl, *La mentalité primitive*, Paris, 1922, p. 45; *Le surnaturel et la nature dans la mentalité primitive*, Paris, 1931, p. 219; E. Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, London, 1926, i, 23; *Christianity and Morals*, London, 1939, p. 2. It is not without interest to note that substantially the same facts were pointed out long ago by none other than Cicero (*de nat. deor.*, ii, 5, 14).

characterised by other "abnormal" features such as upper teeth, a horny ridge in their place, etc. Among semi-civilised peoples such children are as a rule destroyed immediately after their birth; but occasionally they are considered good omens, manifestations of the divine, and as a result become the objects of religious veneration or even of a regular cult. Since the nations which at the present time are ranked among the civilised were once upon a time on the same cultural level as modern savages or barbarians, it stands to reason that the fears and hopes referred to in those remote times were shared by the peoples of Europe and Asia. The late James Rendel Harris was the first to point out that the cult of the Heavenly Twins, the Hellenic Dioscures and their Hindoo, Celtic and Teutonic cousins, originated in the superstitious fear of twin births.² The subject has since been widely discussed, and it will be necessary to revert to it here.³

The birth of albino⁴ children has been (and in many parts of the earth still is) the subject of similar fears. The fundamental facts, both pathological and anthropological, were reviewed, more than half a century ago, by one of the founders of modern ethnology, Richard Andree.⁵ But neither he nor F. Sarasin⁶ attempted to trace the part played by albinism in certain traditions of European and Asiatic peoples.⁷ Yet it stands to reason that, like the superstitions attached to multiple births, those connected with albino children should have left their mark in the folklore and legends of the civilised part of humanity. Thus it may be of some interest to review the traditions in question and to compare them with the beliefs concerning albinos that have been recorded among the semi-civilised.

I

In his *Book of Kings*, Firdousi relates at some length the birth of Zal, the son of Sâm, king of Segestân, by one of his favourite wives. The child is born with snow-white hair (whence the name *Zal*, which means "old man"), and no one dares to announce the birth to the father. Only the nurse at last musters enough courage to convey the news to King Sâm. The latter is greatly perturbed; for he considers his son a

² James Rendel Harris, *The Cult of the Heavenly Twins*, Cambridge, 1906; *Boanerges*, Cambridge, 1913.

³ Cf. the writer's book, *Mythologie Universelle*, Paris, Payot, 1930, pp. 53-100.

⁴ The word *albino* was coined by the Portuguese to denote certain "white negroes" in the interior of Africa. Cf. Voltaire, *Essai sur les Mœurs* (*Œuvres complètes* (Paris, 1877-85), t. xii, p. 367).

⁵ *Ethnographische Parallelen und Vergleiche*, N.F., Leipzig, 1889, pp. 238 ff.

⁶ "Die Anschauungen der Völker über den Albinismus," *Schweizerisches Archiv f. Volkskunde*, xxxiv (1935), pp. 198-233.

⁷ It is worth mentioning that the aversion in question extends to albino animals. Thus in certain parts of Europe white cows are not liked; witness the East Prussian proverb, "Pfarrerstöchter und weisse Küh' geraten selten oder nie," i.e. Preachers' daughters and white cows are rarely or never a source of satisfaction to the owner or to the community. Cf. H. Brunnhofer, *Arische Urzeit*, Bern, 1910.

creature of Ahriman and fears the mockery of the great of his realm. He accordingly orders the child to be abandoned in the wilderness.⁸

The description given of the new-born child leaves no doubt about the fact that Zal is an albino. A brief survey of the ethnographical literature will show that Sâm's views and conduct are in strict accordance with those held and observed, with regard to albinos, among many savage and barbarian tribes of our globe. Thus in Senegambia they are thought to be evil spirits and wizards, who are therefore frequently killed without compunction.⁹ In Nias, an island near Sumatra, albinos are called *Onom Bela*, "children of the Devil", their father being, in popular opinion, the Evil One in person.¹⁰ As for their human father, he is said to have patience for as much as fifteen years, still hoping that the child's colour may change. If it fails to do that, it is invariably killed; but frequently enough albino children are slain immediately after their birth. If an albino child is thought to be the offspring of the Devil, the obvious inference is that the Devil himself was imagined to be an albino, a conclusion borne out by the widespread African belief in a "white devil" far antedating the first contacts of these populations with Europeans.¹¹ Among the Dajaks of Borneo the birth of an albino child is a decidedly evil omen.¹² In the Moluccas, albinos were regarded as vermin and slain outright wherever they were found, if we are to believe a seventeenth-century traveller.¹³ In the East Indian archipelago, albinos are generally believed to be the offspring of the spirits of the dead by a living mother.¹⁴ The Maori of New Zealand held that they are the offspring of mortal women guilty of intercourse with forest spirits.¹⁵ In China, albino children are frequently abandoned or sold by their parents.¹⁶ Much the same custom obtains in Burma and British India generally.¹⁷ In the latter country, albino children are in many cases exposed immediately after their birth, to be devoured by carnivorous animals and birds of prey.¹⁸ To return to Africa, in the French Congo albinos used to be slain immediately after their birth;¹⁹ they are often held to be the incarnation of water spirits.²⁰ Similarly, the Betchuans used to slay albino children, and it is no accident that mission houses in Africa are counting numerous albinos among their wards, not

⁸ Firdousi, *Le Livre des Rois*, trad. J. Mohl, Paris, 1876-78, i, 167; cf. Fr. Spiegel, *Erânische Alterthumskunde*, Leipzig, 1871-78, i, 565; Th. Nöldeke, *Das iranische Nationalepos*, Berlin-Leipzig, 1920, p. 10.

⁹ Andree, *op cit.*, p. 240; Sarasin, *op. cit.*, pp. 215 f.

¹⁰ Andree, p. 241.

¹¹ Th. Waitz, *Anthropologie der Naturvölker*, ii (Leipzig, 1860), p. 503.

¹² Sarasin, p. 213.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ A. C. Kruijt, *Het animisme in den Indischen Archipel*, 's Gravenhage, 1906, pp. 398 and 509; cf. E. S. Hartland, *Ritual and Belief*, London, 1914, p. 197.

¹⁵ R. U. Sayce, *Folk-Lore*, xlv (1934), p. 117.

¹⁶ Sarasin, p. 214.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 214 f.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

²⁰ J. H. Weeks, *Folk-Lore*, xix (1908), pp. 422 f.

because of any special fondness on the part of their directors for freaks of nature, but to save such children from certain death.²¹

The treatment meted out to Zal is therefore proof conclusive that the ancient Persians held the same views about albino children which are (or until recently were) found in many parts of Asia, Indonesia and Africa.

II

Sâm, as we have seen, was of the opinion that his albino son was a creature of Ahriman, and a number of semi-civilised tribes still believe that albino children are the offspring of the Evil One. This would seem to indicate that in ancient Iran Ahriman was himself pictured as an albino, very much as the "white devil" of certain African nations. The destruction of the larger part of Zoroastrian literature has unfortunately made it impossible to obtain absolute certainty on this point ; but there is some indirect evidence available.

In the Coptic *Apocalypse of Elijah*²² the Antichrist, i.e. the false Messiah who is to appear before the second coming of Jesus, is described as a typical albino, having "a tuft of white hair in front of his head," while in the Jewish legend of Armillus the Antichrist is bald-headed altogether.²³ To these features the Coptic text adds many of the characteristics of persons stricken with leprosy. Much the same description recurs in the Irish *Leabhar Breac*.²⁴

Now it is to be noted, first, that in India albinos are regarded even now as leprous, and are therefore excluded from cremation,²⁵ while most so-called barbarians and savages do not even to-day draw a distinction between genuine albinism and various skin diseases pertaining of the character of leprosy or closely related to it.²⁶ Nor was albinism (*leucoma*, *vittiligo*, etc.) in antiquity differentiated from true *elephantiasis* by the Jewish priests.²⁷ Again, there is no reason to assume that the ancient Iranians took a different view of the matter, and it is significant that in one tradition King Yima is stricken with leprosy after his hand has touched Ahriman.²⁸

In the second place, the whole conception of the Antichrist has been shown to be of Persian origin ; for he is none other than the Devil incarnate, i.e. Ahriman, who will reappear before the final world con-

²¹ Sarasin, p. 216.

²² Ed. Stern, *Zeitschrift f. ägyptische Sprache*, 1886, pp. 115 ff. ; ed. Steindorff, in Gebhardt-Harnack, *Texte u. Untersuchungen z. Geschichte d. altchristlichen Literatur, N.F.*, ii (3), (Leipzig, 1899) ; Bousset, *The Antichrist Legend*, London, 1896, p. 156.

²³ A. Jeremias, *Das Alte Testament im Lichte des Alten Orients*, Leipzig, 1930, p. 767.

²⁴ Cf. D. Fitzgerald, *Revue des traditions populaires*, i (1886), p. 130.

²⁵ Sarasin, p. 215.

²⁶ Gerland-Waitz, *Anthropologie der Naturvölker*, ii (1877), p. 97.

²⁷ Robert Eisler, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*, London, 1931, p. 453, n. 4.

²⁸ E. Stucken, *Astralmythen*, Leipzig, 1896-1907, i, 403.

flagration, when he will be destroyed by Ormuzd.²⁹ We are therefore led to conclude that this particular feature of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* is likewise of Iranian origin, which would permit the further inference that Ahriman himself was thought of as an albino or, perhaps, a leper. This would explain the view taken by King Sâm to the effect that Zal was a creature of Ahriman, that is, presumably, a son of Ahriman begotten on Sâm's wife.

III

There remains a third rather curious testimony bearing indirectly on ancient beliefs attached to albinos in Iran. The M.H.G. *Wolfdietrich* contains an episode obviously borrowed from some Oriental narrative akin to Sindbâd's adventure with the giant cannibal.³⁰ As a matter of fact, this epic contains a considerable number of features which recur in Firdousi's *Book of Kings*, a fact first pointed out by L. Uhland more than a century ago.³¹ At all events, in the *Wolfdietrich* the cannibal in question has hair *îwz alsô ein swan*, "as white as a swan." Naturally, the author did not add this feature as a thing of beauty; for the giant has as unflattering an exterior as Homer's Polyphemus. He simply meant to imply that the monster was an albino. It will of course not do to derive this feature, which is found in no parallel text, from Solinus' description of the Caucasian Albani, who are depicted as true albinos,³² though not as cannibals. It is rather part and parcel of the parallel text of the Sindbâd episode referred to which, like many of the tales of the *Arabian Nights*, is not of Arabic but of Persian origin, and the albinism of the cannibal simply characterises him as a creature of Ahriman.

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²⁹ W. Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter*, Tübingen, 1926, p. 517; cf. A. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité*, Paris, 1879-82, ii, 208.

³⁰ H. Schneider, *Die Gedichte und die Sage von Wolfdietrich*, München, 1913, p. 316; cf. V. Chauvin, *Bibliographie*, vii, 15 ff.

³¹ Ludwig Uhland, *Schriften*, i, 178; cf. Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

³² Solinus, xv, 5: at Albani in ora agentes, qui posteros se Iasonis credi volunt, albo crine nascuntur, canitiem habent auspiciu capillorum: ergo capitis color genti nomen dedit. Glauca oculis inest popula: ideo nocte plus quam die cernunt.